

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 29, 2010

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

The Honorable Martha Johnson
Administrator
General Services Administration
1800 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20405

Dear Secretary Shinseki and Administrator Johnson:

As you know, beginning in December 2010, the Richard H. Poff Federal Building, which contains the Roanoke Veterans Affairs Regional Office (VARO), is scheduled to undergo a major modernization and reconstruction effort using funds provided under the American Recovery and Investment Act (ARRA). While we commend efforts to increase facility energy efficiencies, we are concerned that these scheduled improvements will inhibit ongoing efforts to reduce the Roanoke VARO's growing claims backlog, and will fail to address its long-term capacity issues.

Under ARRA modernization plans, Roanoke's current offices will be relocated to temporary spaces at four separate off-site locations, up to one mile apart. The first move will relocate 75 employees in December 2010, with 300 more scheduled to move in May 2011. Given that the Roanoke VARO claims backlog stands at 34 percent, we have serious concerns about the effect this disruption will have on claims processing operations.


The planned renovations will not only impede claims processing, but will fail to address several of Roanoke's critical infrastructure needs. Ideally, to optimize work-flow operations, facilities should be arranged on no more than two or three floors, as in the Houston VARO. Roanoke's facility is divided over eight floors that lack infrastructure for an operation of this size, such as freight elevators necessary for efficient records transport. Additionally, the building lacks adequate restroom facilities for disabled veterans. The ARRA modernization plans address neither of these issues.

We ask that you consider alternatives to the current reconstruction plan. One such alternative to spending over \$50 million to refurbish the Poff Building would be to construct a new facility that meets federal environmental efficiency standards, addresses

Roanoke's current infrastructure needs, allows claims processing staff to continue working without disruption during construction, and improves convenience for veterans. As a point of reference we note the Lincoln, Nebraska VARO was recently constructed for approximately \$30 million, a significantly lower cost to the taxpayers than the planned ARRA modernization efforts.

We appreciate your consideration of these issues and look forward to hearing your thoughts on this matter.

Sincerely,


Jim Webb
United States Senator


Mark Warner
United States Senator